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SUBJECT: SENATE PRESIDENT KEN NNAMANI ON CURRENT
PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS

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Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Senate President Nnamani says he has been asked by Presidential candidates Katsina Governor Yar'Adua, former Chief of State Buhari and Vice President Atiku -- currently, the three leaders of the pack -- each to serve as his Vice Presidential running mate. However, Nnamani says that his Senate colleagues warn him that to do so will open the Senate as an institution to increased pressure from President Obasanjo during the run-up to the elections. He was pessimistic about the outlook for credible elections in April 2007, and urged increased American support for them, though he was vague as to how such support could be shown. End summary.

12. (C) Senate President Ken Nnamani met in Washington January 5 with the AF PDAS, the U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria and the AF/W office director. He was accompanied by his Washington representative, Hubert S. Shaiyen. His purpose appeared to be to share his pessimism about the outlook for credible elections in April in Nigeria and to ask for additional, largely undefined U.S. intervention in support of a democratic political process. He said that each of the three leading presidential contenders had asked him to serve as his Vice Presidential running mate. In addition, Sokoto Governor Bafarawa, a second tier presidential candidate, had also approached him. Alluding to the atmosphere of political uncertainty, Nnamani observed that neither Buhari nor Atiku would withdraw in favor of the other, forestalling a united opposition, and he raised the possibility that the PDP would replace Gov. Yar'Adua as its presidential candidate because of poor health before the February 14 candidate registration deadline. And all three leading presidential contenders already have running mates, despite their approaches to Nnamani. Saying that he had provided no definitive answer as to whether he would agree to run for Vice President, Nnamani said that his colleagues were telling him that should he be absent, the Senate would be subject to increased pressure from President Obasanjo during a period of poisonous political tension: &I can work with President Obasanjo; I know how to say no to him,8 Nnamani commented. For example, he observed that under his leadership the Senate would defeat dueling attempts to impeach the President and the Vice President.

13. (C) Nnamani said that the conduct of voter registration

and the party conventions and their preparation were a good indication of how the elections would be conducted. On that basis, he said, he was pessimistic that the 2007 elections would be credible. Voter registration was behind schedule, with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) either unable or unwilling to produce a credible registration list within the legally prescribed timeframe, despite pressure to do so from the National Assembly. Yet, in response to a query as to why voter registration was a prerequisite for a successful election, his reply was essentially that the Nigerian people expected it -- and it potentially served as a check on pervasive rigging. Within the PDP, he continued, the President had broken or flouted the party's own rules and procedures, and he had imposed Gov. Yar'Adua as its presidential candidate without widespread party support. Within most of the parties, including the PDP, the preliminaries to the conventions had seen widespread violence, with many unresolved murders. (He made specific reference to the unexplained December 22 murder of the General Editor of ThisDay, one of Nigeria's leading dailies.) He agreed with the observation that the Nigerian people appear remarkably passive about the decay of the democratic process and said he did not know how they would respond if the April elections were not credible. With gloom, he observed that the trend line is moving in the wrong direction: the 2003 elections were less credible than those of 1999, and those of 1999 less credible than those of 1993.

¶4. (C) Nnamani appeared to look to the U.S. to somehow "fix" the shortcomings of the Nigerian political process, while also acknowledging that with a projected 122,000 polling stations, it is Nigerians who must assume the responsibility for credible elections. When pressed as to what more the U.S. could do, he acknowledged that there is no shortage of funds for INEC. He also acknowledged the embassy's pro-active public stance in support of the elections. He said that high level U.S. legislative and

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executive branch visitors carrying a pro-democracy message to the presidency might help. Without being explicit, he implied that it is the President who is responsible for the poor outlook for the 2007 elections and that U.S. political leaders could somehow bring him around.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: As a southern Christian politician with a good reputation, Nnamani is a natural vice-presidential running mate for a northern Muslim presidential candidate. So, it is no surprise that the leading presidential candidates have approached him. As Senate president, he did not support a third term for President Obasanjo, but he has had a working relationship with the Villa. In his January 5 conversation, he did not signal whether he would run for Vice President. He was more pessimistic than the Ambassador has seen before about politics and the prospects for stability, and he was strangely passive about the responsibility of Nigerians for their future. His university education was in the U.S., and he worked for the DuPont Corporation in Wilmington, Delaware, for some years. So, perhaps his hope that the U.S. could somehow save the 2007 elections is unsurprising. But, he was short on specific suggestions about what we could do. END COMMENT.
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